



# **GROWTH STRATEGY IN THE FIELD OF EVENT PROMOTIONS**

Case Study: OFRD Ltd.

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Bachelor's thesis  
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## **ABSTRACT**

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This bachelor's thesis paper was commissioned by OFRD Ltd., a Helsinki-based marketing agency operating in the event promotions field. The main objective of the thesis is to provide OFRD with the tools of how to beat the competition and grow in a field that has fierce competition.

The reason why the thesis was found valuable now in 2016 is the continuous reach towards growth many small and medium-sized companies share today. OFRD Ltd. aims to be the best office in the field by 2020. Their goal is to be highly appreciated by their clients while aiming at acquiring more significant names as customers.

The desk research was conducted using secondary data from online publications and literature including relevant books as well as newspapers. Throughout the process, the data was analyzed keeping the relevancy for OFRD Ltd. in mind. Benchmarking process between OFRD Ltd. and the industry leader in Finland, Irokeesi was then conducted to find out more ways to improve the current business functions.

Main findings that could be acknowledged from the theoretical framework and from the benchmarking process were that in order small and medium-sized companies can be successful they should continuously search for growth to reach it. Global mind-set as well as usage of the latest technology should be in the core of business. Researches presented that in the past couple of years, sales and employees brought growth to small and medium-sized companies in the service sector; meaning the focus should be on delivering excellent customer-service and maintaining good reputation while providing diversified services to customers. Also, brand extensions and alliances may be the road to growth as commonly collaboration equals strength. Today it is important to include customers in the business processes; social media is definitely one of the best locations to implement it, as social proof is all. The content shared in the various channels of social media should be pandemic and interesting, it should always be up-to-date. The content should create emotions in the viewer and plant the image company aims at into consumers' minds. In event promotions, big names are everything; the focus should be on getting them as customers. In addition to this, in the field numbers and names also do matter, show them, sell them.

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Keywords: company growth, growth strategy, benchmarking

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

This bachelor's thesis is about growth and the strategic moves that should be done in order to grow in the field of event promotions. Helsinki-based marketing agency OFRD Ltd. has commissioned the thesis.

Today it seems to be every company's wish to be global, grow the business and take the fast path to success and glory. Yet there are not plenty of the ones, which do succeed in it. So the question is, why do companies fail in growing their business?

In 2016 there are around 2000 marketing agencies in Finland out of which 25 largest cover most of the market. The amount of agencies in this field has decreased greatly during the last decade as advertising has shifted from face-to-face to Internet adverts. The trend has been clear from 2010 onwards; while the average turnover of marketing agencies has significantly decreased year after year, OFRD has maintained stable growth.

Customer-oriented approach to business, innovation, new technology and multiple channels to meet the customer are today more important than ever. There is no reason why a company could not create sustainable growth in the difficult years of recession (Porkka, J. 2014). However this all comes down once again to the importance of the strategy.

*"Don't be afraid to solve the hard problems that everyone else avoids. There is a lot of money to be made, when you're the first person to fix something" (Clear, J. American-express.com)*

To settle is the biggest obstacle and the worst enemy on the road to growth. To override the obstacles of growth the key is to search for the right people at the right time. Now the timing is perfect; there are plenty of success stories of small and medium-sized companies who have been able to grow during the past couple of years. With the focused mind-set, goals higher than the average as well as with the attitude that being global is more of an opportunity than a challenge, growth is reachable (Kauppalehti, 9.12.15).

The growth for small and medium-sized enterprises is of a few issues that need to be concentrated on. To start with, globalisation and digitalisation are in the core. Besides that, no matter whether a narrow or a wider niche company targets at, the mind-set should be of being the world's best in the focused niche. Growth will not just happen without searching for it; it should be searched from places further and further away and for all of this, collaboration equals strength (Kauppalehti, 7.12.2015).

## **1.1 Thesis background**

This bachelor's thesis was written during the Autumn 2015 and Spring 2016. The idea behind it arose while discussing with one of the project managers in OFRD, Ida Mansikkamäki about their current state of business. Even though the competition is fierce in the field of event promotions, OFRD's vision is to be the best workplace for its employees and the best office providing event promotions in Finland roughly by 2020. In order to grow, they aim at gaining more large customers and thus maximizing the profit.

The commissioner of this thesis, OFRD Ltd. (earlier OFF ROAD PROMOTION & MANAGEMENT Ltd., later abbreviated to OFRD Ltd.) is a marketing agency focusing on event promotions in Finland. Five members out of whom three are currently working in OFRD founded the company in 2009. During the past six years the company has created a solid reputation of delivering its services with enthusiasm and expertise. Now in 2016, OFRD has five employees working in management level and approximately 150 promotion workers.

Different approaches for the topic were discussed. First, we started with the topic of how to build strong enough position that companies find OFRD to implement their event promotions. All in all, the main question in this stage was that how do companies choose their marketing agency? We discussed the possibility to conduct a survey through either phone or e-mail. While thinking through this option, it was clear that the people who are responsible for selecting the agency would be either really difficult or impossible to reach. In addition to that, the possibility of these companies showing their interest towards co-operation, and therefore giving valuable information for the topic was found rather small.

The financial years of 2013 and 2014 have presented themselves with strong growth in the revenue for OFRD Ltd. To raise the interest of the companies behind strong brands such as Paulig, which is currently one of the largest customers of OFRD, increasing visibility is in the core of business. Therefore, after going deeper into the topic, it was clear that all of this leads back to the importance of company growth, benchmarking the current position, which then was decided to be the topic of this bachelor's thesis.

## 1.2 Thesis purpose and objective

The objective of the thesis is to find the best way to reach growth for OFRD by benchmarking the current situation as well as comparing and evaluating the most successful strategies and the most current researches from the past five to ten years as well as the trends prevalent today. Simply, the purpose of this research is to present the best strategic options for sustainable future growth in the field of event promotions. Later, the strategy that would be best applied for OFRD will be discussed in details and also recommendations for the future will be given.

## 1.3 Research questions, framing and execution

The research question for this thesis is *which strategy should be applied when aiming at company growth in the field of event promotions?*

The figure found below illustrates the main topics that are considered in this thesis paper. With these sub-questions, the research question can be answered.

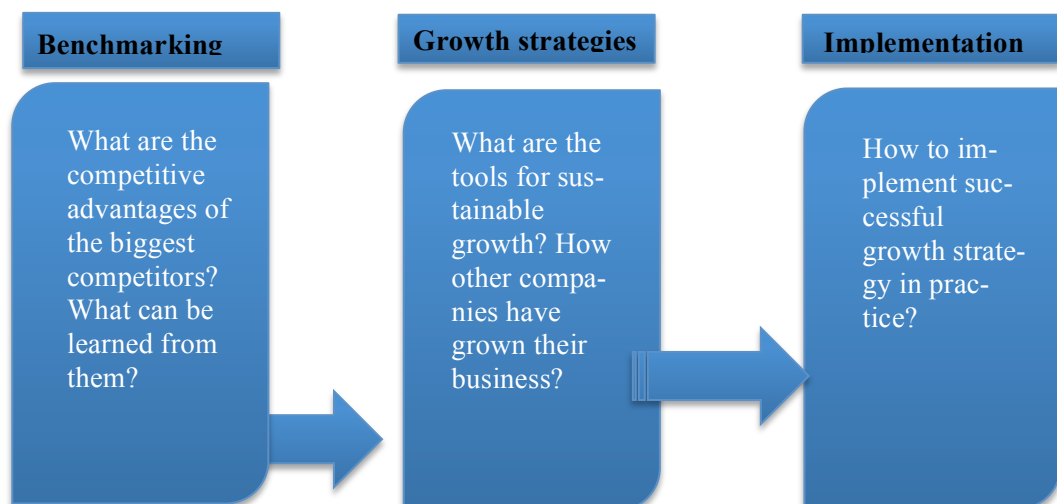


FIGURE 1. Questions to be answered in this thesis.

This thesis is a desk research where the theory and analysis is based on the secondary data. The theoretical framework for this thesis is studied from various sources including relevant business-related articles, newspapers as well as books most of them accessed in the e-portals of Tampere University of Applied Sciences such as Nelli and Finna. As the biggest source of information Emerald Insight research journals from 2005 to 2015 are examined. Since neither interviews nor surveys were found significant in this type of research the thesis will include information gathered from publications and from the discussion with the project manager Ida Mansikkamäki in the office of OFRD as well as from the CEO of OFRD Karri Ruuskanen.

Besides this, to gain more insight, the benchmarking process is carried out with one of the most significant competitors of OFRD, the pioneer of successful event promotions, experiential marketing agency Irokeesi. In addition to this, smaller examples of other competitors will be examined. Benchmarking which is also known as role model analysis gives information of how competitors have earlier succeeded to grow their businesses. In other words, benchmarking means questioning the way your company is operating while comparing it to others and trying to learn from more successful ones. The reason why benchmarking is considered useful in this research is simple; competition drives the company to do the ultimate best performance, it drives towards innovation. In this case competition also provides us with more knowledge of how to achieve the highest rankings in the field of event promotions. Like Kozak (2004) stated, benchmarking is “an action discovering the specific practices responsible for high performance, understanding how these practices work and are achieved, and adapting them to one’s organization”.

#### **1.4 The structure of the thesis**

Chapter two of the thesis will give more information about the commissioner of the thesis both from financial and company services side. Following chapter three includes the theoretical framework, the base for the whole thesis. In chapter four benchmarking process will be applied and later in the chapter five, main findings from both theoretical

framework as well as benchmarking will be presented. Last but not the least follows final recommendations for the future of the commissioner. References can be found in the end of the thesis paper.

## **1.5 Limitations**

This thesis does not aim at providing complete analysis or criticism of theories; theories are always analysed from the viewpoint that is found useful for the commissioner. Additionally, no thorough explanation of the commissioner's working models is presented, as the emphasis of the thesis does not demand it. Also this thesis will not cover all the parts within an extensive growth strategy but to concentrate on the parts that are found the most valuable with the focus on marketing, as it was the writer's major in the studies.



## **2 THE COMMISSIONER – OFRD Ltd.**

This chapter gives more information about the commissioner of the thesis. It will present a broad view on the company services, principles as well as economical state of business today. Everything later presented will be based on the relevancy for the commissioner.

### **2.1 The vision**

The commissioner of the thesis marketing agency OFRD Ltd. has a clear vision of what they are doing; they market, meet, activate and help consumers to buy as it is stated in their website. OFRD operates in the field of event promotions and similarly to many other companies in the field, the biggest portion of their sales events takes place in the Capital region. To enable this, approximately one third of the promotion workers of OFRD are based there. In addition to Helsinki area, they have resources to produce sales events all around the country, promotion workers also based in 10 different cities outside Capital region (ofrd.fi. 2015).

As the CEO of OFRD Karri Ruuskanen states, it is rather easy to access the market of event promotions and have a small portion of sales. However the competition significantly limits the possibilities to grow. Also the competition of the largest and the most notable names as customers is intense as most of the companies in the field offer more or less the same services.

According to Ruuskanen, there is plenty to be done in order to get the area of promotions to be as appreciated as the other fields of marketing such as the fields of advertising and marketing communications. Still today, says Ruuskanen, there are improvements that should be done with the image of the whole field. Even though promotions is quite fresh branch within marketing, rather often slightly negative image of some bimbo offering drinks is the only vision people get. In OFRD they place a lot of effort on thinking outside the box when creating solutions, training the employees to be sales professionals and continuously improving the results. Their aim is to deliver professional, concrete results that speak from their behalf and show the actual benefit of having OFRD as one's customer.

## 2.2 Company services

OFRD provides their customers with various types of events from fair stands and sales presentations to corporate celebrations and road shows. OFRD has the expertise to implement the entire process from creating the concept, gathering all the materials and taking care of logistics to establishing the event with the competent promotion workers and finally, gathering feedback. However if desired, customizing part of the process for customer can be handled, too. The length of partnerships also varies greatly as while some choose to have OFRD to implement only one project for instance in a week's notice, some partnerships last for several years and various projects are implemented in collaboration within the specified time frame (ofrd.fi. 2015).



PICTURE 1. Promotion worker in the sales event. Source: ofrd.fi.

As stated, OFRD has a focus on delivering excellent results. Achieving “Finland’s strongest” registered trademark certificate from Asiakastieto in 2015 is a proof of creditworthiness, reliability and excellent ability to pay. It is based on the success of previous years from financial viewpoint and shows to collaboration partners that OFRD has a solid and sustainable base for its operations (Asiakastieto.fi. 2015).

From product launchings to service presentations, OFRD gives their customer the keys to improve the awareness and visibility of the customer company in their operating field

and increase the sales. Most of the current customers of OFRD are from the earlier projects. Furthermore, some of the customers are found through direct marketing by phone and some through customer recommendations. The list of satisfied customers of OFRD includes for instance one of the leading banks in Finland Nordea bank, Paulig Cupsolo drinks, One Piece overalls, successful marketing agency BOB Helsinki, cars manufacturer Skoda as well as retail group Stockmann, just to name a few.

### 2.3 The economics

There has been stable growth in the turnover every year since OFRD Ltd. was established. During the past five years the company has reached the turnover category of 0,4-1 million euros (Fonecta-concern) with the turnover of over 790 000 euros in 2014. (Finder.fi. 2015) As the business has grown in the recent years, OFRD has been able to hire new staff and therefore also to increase the business opportunities while reaching new customers.

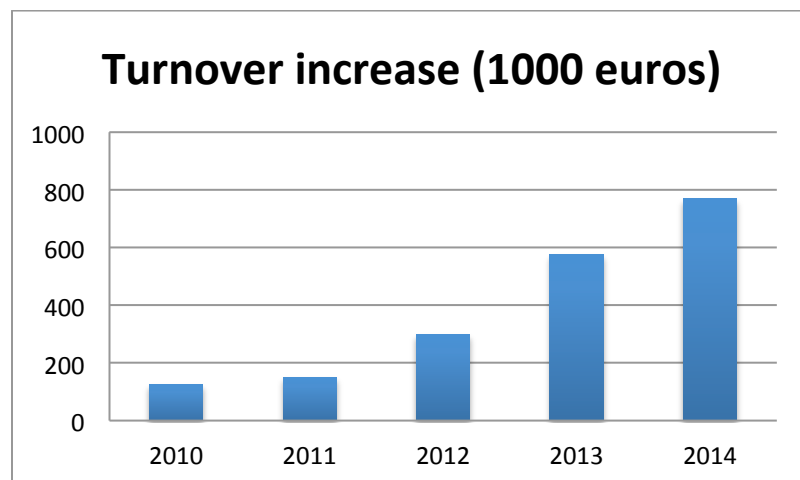


FIGURE 2. Development of the turnover of OFRD Ltd. Source: Figure adapted from Finder.fi.

### 3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter includes multiple views to successful strategy and gives the base for the main findings presented in the end of the thesis. Theoretical framework leads the reader through basics of strategy, timing and customer segmentation as well as analysis, presents how marketing mix can be applied to event promotions and finally discusses about the role of innovation in growth as well as growth strategies today, having the focus on extension and alliance growth strategies. This chapter also supports the following chapter where benchmarking process is implemented.

#### 3.1 Strategy

The word strategy comes initially from Greek word *stratigia*, which means, “*leading an army*” (businessdictionary.com. 2015). As strategy should be in the core of actions and all the decisions should be consistent with its defined lines, the definition is competent. Strategy is basically the path to desired future outcome; it may be about finding the solution to a problem or simply improving the business for instance to increase the sales. Whichever the wanted result, strategy should help to allocate the resources in as efficient and effective way as possible.

Like Darren Dahl, the contributing editor of Inc.com (2005) phrases it: “strategic planning is one of the big guilt trips of business. Everyone knows you should do it, but the process is intimidating, expensive, and time-consuming”. Reeves et al. (2012) state that the mistake that is often done to shorten the planning time is that planners adopt strategies, which are not specifically designed for their industry and thus they do not succeed. To begin with, realistic assessment of the current situation of the market as well as company’s strengths and weaknesses is important (Parke, C. 2012). While managers should be flexible, it should also keep in mind that the classical methods of planning change that are often taught in business schools may not be the way to success.

What I found interesting in this topic was the view Robert Romasco, the president of the American Association of Retired Persons (2012) presented: “what does success look like in 10 years out?” Which are the characteristics that customers do value in 10 years? Is the management level of the company able to develop and later execute a strategy

that is viable in the future? How do we want society to look like and will it really show out like that? Even though many companies create traditional 10-year plans, this is a new viewpoint. *What means successful in 10 years?* (Sterling, J. & Rader, D., 2012)

### **3.1.1 A successful strategy**

#### *Universal, business-specific and contingency view*

”It is necessary to choose a business strategy that relies on a thorough understanding of the company setting” (Pehrsson, A. 2007). The first of three competing views that are presented in the article of Pehrsson is the universal view, referring to the universal laws for strategy that are always present making it possible to generalize already existing successful strategies to basically any company in some level. Neither the environment where the company operates nor the field where it operates play a significant role (Pehrsson, A. 2007).

The second, the business-specific view states that no general conclusions can be made since the company strategy is always dependent on both environmental and company features. However, in contrary to business-specific view, some sort of generalizations based on the company size and operating sector can be executed. This leads to conclusion that both business-specific and universal views are too simplified to provide accurate enough business strategies when aiming at growing the business (Pehrsson, A. 2007).

Commonly, the starting point is to understand that there are never two exactly identical strategic settings. The question is more of to which level the strategy should be tailored and be unique. Competing contingency view supports this viewpoint by stating that there are some dimensions that cannot be known beforehand while some generalizations can be made. While contingency view requires deeper understanding of the current state of the company, it can also provide more information when used correctly (Pehrsson, A. 2007).

#### *Success factors*

Barry Jaruzelski and Cesare R. Mainardi from Booz & Company (2011) executed a research on global innovation by interviewing more than 450 innovation executives around the globe. According to the research, successful strategies have a few things in common.

During the idea creation process, it is advised to gain insight for customers' needs. Additionally always use the brand-new technology to implement the process. Then in the product developing stage, engage actively with customers in order to be able to assess the market potential. Finally, when to commercialize, effective launch after close up work with careful and precise pilot users is a must (Forbes.com. 2011).

However, the most valuable part of the research of Jaruzelski and Mainardi was to recognize that the most successful companies were the ones who had a strong focus on one specific aligned set of distinct capabilities that enabled them to execute their chosen strategy in the most efficient way (Forbes.com. 2011).

Apple has been voted to be the most innovative company in the world of all times. After a long struggle in the past when Apple tried to pioneer in various different consumer devices and failed so many times it eventually led to massive losses, Apple switched its focus on the capabilities where it was excellent, referring to the ones where it differentiated from the competition greatly. It succeeded because it narrowed its portfolio and allocated the resources for only what matters the most (Forbes.com. 2011).

Today, Apple is known for its iconic branding, great product design and user experience as well as an exceptional user interfaces. As much as acknowledging which parts do matter, the process is about realizing which ones do not. Even though there would be a great competence in some specific field, if it doesn't make a big difference in the company, the energy should be focused on something where the possibility to differentiate is greater (Forbes.com. 2011).

### **3.1.2 Strategy and timing**

Often the biggest challenge with strategies is the time schedule. Too often it takes about a year for a company to plan and accomplish the strategy and by the time the market

may have changed significantly making the strategy irrelevant for the time being. Consultant Keith McFarland says that in order to make the process of creating business growth strategy valuable, it is better to create the strategy within a couple of days. The key on how to be successful in this controversial view is to encourage both conflict and consensus, which stimulate creative thinking (inc.com. 2005).

McFarland (2005) advises to concentrate on questions about the near future of the company such as what are the four biggest challenges over the coming year and which five things customers like best about the company. Not only the management level but also regular employees should be included to the thinking process to gain new ideas and to be able to think wider. L. Russell and J. Reynolds-Sinclair both from GEO Group Strategic Services (2012) propose that in order to succeed the strategic decision cycles should be faster and smarter than the average. They state that management level should focus on the immediate next steps and do it sharply and precisely (Sterling, J. & Rader, D., 2012).

From the resource allocation's point of view, what are the top potential profits centres within the company and how to take the best out of them. When the consensus on where the company wants to be in five years has been reached, the next thing to do according to McFarland (2005) is to create a series of 90-days goals which all participate on getting closer to the five year goal. When it comes to small and medium-sized enterprises, there are some features that are common for most of them such as centralised management, limited resources in finance and human capital, focus on daily business functions as well as short-term strategy (Torrés and Julien, 2005). These all potentially affect on the choice of the right strategy. In addition to this, knowledge and the management of it are something commonly considered as critical sources of growth (Salojärvi et al., 2005).

*“ To successfully exploit the potential of social media, companies need to design experiences that deliver tangible value in return for customers' time, attention, endorsement and data. ” (Baird & Parasnis, 2011)*

There is no place where the timing is more crucial than in social media platforms. In today's world, social media and word-of-mouth marketing play a significant role in new customer acquisition. It is vital to learn what is the best time to communicate with the

existing as well as potential customers and get the feedback from the market. Carolyn Heller Baird and Gautam Parasnis (2011) found out in their research about social customer relationship management that in contrary to what many companies think, social media to more than half of the respondents is about friends and family and the need to connect with companies does not exist there. This all highlights the importance of word-of-mouth marketing and the existing link between word-of-mouth and social media as it is today. One good recommendation from the right person in almost any of the social media platforms can lead to great deal of visibility and possibly to new customers, too (Baird, C. H. & Parasnis G., 2011).

### 3.1.3 Strategy and customer

Knowing and understanding your customer is the start point for all marketing. Only by listening to customers' needs, a company can be positive that their selected competitive strategy can and will bring substantial amount of additional value to the customer (Porkka, J., 2014). When the company strategy has been created, it is time that marketing tells the story to the customers.

More than often the largest profits as well as possibilities to widen the operations are sought from the product-driven options even though today most of the opportunities lay on customer-driven growth for the company. *Product-oriented activities* mean that a company produces and then offers certain beforehand designed product for multiple clients. The opposite of product-oriented is *customer-oriented activities* that refer to activities that have been designed based on customer's wants and needs, services are then customized for each and every company case-related. Customer should always have his say in how the end product should be like (Porkka, J., 2014).

Services can never be sustainable without customers; the interaction between the provider and the customer is the co-creation of the service. Because of the intangible form of the service, service can be only assessed and the value created through the eyes of the consumer (Vargo & Lusch, 2008). Thus the process of service differentiation is more difficult to copy (Baines et al., 2009). While the co-creation of service gives possibilities to companies, it also presents fundamental requirements of customer understanding. In some cases customer is one regular person whose aspirations can be measured and



evaluated in the matter of seconds, meanwhile in the case of the business-to-business customer where different departments, customers and parts of the company are responsible for different parts of the process basically mean that the user and evaluator might be completely different persons. Therefore the profound knowledge of the customer and all the company processes that may appear is vital (Tuli et al., 2007).

A company should consider customers as different types. Meaning that while the company knows which services are the biggest sellers, they should also know which customer types are the most profitable ones. As some of the services always outperform others, it is good to further evaluate the strategy of these outperforming cases. There is always a reason behind the bigger sales whether the services are better known, they bring more additional value for the customer or they beat the similar services of competitors' (Porkka, J. 2014). Also to consider how the ultimate desired value of the services and what customers' currently value differ from each other gives direction for the future operations (Flint et al., 2005).

Customer-oriented services are the case of the future. Services that deliver innovative solutions, always case-specific and taking into consideration what the service outcome should be for the customer, are the ones that will survive in the survival of the fittest. When the company knows how to make fluent communication between company and the customer happen while building long-term customer relationship, the entire process of excellent customer service is in its core (Porkka, J., 2014).

### *Customer segmentation and analysis*

Customer segmentation and finding the target group is the basis for all the business functions; it is vital to know how many segments and which segments of the market the company is focusing on. That will then provide the information of which segments they might be skipping currently but while targeting towards growth, which are the possible segments for the future as well. Company's resources must grow in order to enable company growth, which in turn may present the possibility to provide more customer segments in the future (Porkka, J. 2014).

An example of great customer segmentation is Pepsi. They early realized that it is impossible to beat their biggest competitor Coca Cola in its own game and that's why they

created their own differentiated vision (businessinsider.com. 2011). Another example of a successful company from refreshments side is Red Bull. It has created the whole show surrounding the young and adventurous image they are promoting. Every Formula One racing team and other additional services they have to further promote the product as a luxury item, are in line with their segment, always targeted correctly, which makes the brand credible (successstory.com).

Deeper customer analysis brings more information for the company. There may be certain industries, for example food and beverages industry that purchase way more services of the company than the other ones. No matter whether the reason behind it is of the economical situation of the country or better-targeted advertising towards that specific industry, but to understand it and take the advantage of it is efficient strategic intent (Porkka, J. 2014).

#### **3.1.4 Marketing mix 4 P's and more**

Today when companies are willing to grow and marketing is seen as the part of business that requires plenty of investments and yet has no direct link to revenues and profits, every euro used must be considered profoundly beforehand, not only be used in a good faith (Wise & Sirohi, 2005). The pioneer of marketing David Ogilvy has stated company brand to be “the intangible sum of a product’s attributes: its name, packaging, and price, its history, its reputation, and the way it’s advertised” (Forbes.com. 2011). The statement of Ogilvy justifies why to re-evaluate each and every of the product’s attributes, why it is worth the time and money.

The four Ps of marketing mix is a powerful way to question the choices that have been made and also consider their relevancy today. The four Ps of marketing create the plot; *tell the story*, in its simplest form. These four attributes include product, price, place and promotion.

#### *Product*

When considering the first “P”, product, customer-oriented thinking is important. What is their perceived value of the service? When the times change, services must adapt, too.

In this particular point of time as well as in the near future, what do customers want from this service?

The market position product or service currently has narrates about how the target market perceives it when compared with competitors' brands. To improve the position, consider *how the service differs from the competing ones*? Is there something that could be done to make the product name and compelling tagline catchier so it would stay in customers' minds? Product is seen as an ensemble of everything related to it: the packaging, the design, and the physical features as well all the associated features such as delivery (Solomon et al., 2012).

### *Place*

The second "P" is place. Where would buyers look for this service? Place genuinely refers to supply chain – the continuum of companies working to get the end product to consumers at the exact time they want and in the desired location. While it may be local retailers in the case of clothing stores, today the location refers more and more to searching and buying online. While ten years ago no service was found only online, the shift has been dramatic. No matter whether operating online or in stores, gathering the right quantities of right products to right places is the key (Solomon et al., 2012).

### *Price*

Marketing mix continues with third "P" referring to price. Pricing is an opportunity; while huge signs greet with text "sale" to raise consumers' interest, pricing the product higher than the average will communicate a message as well. An example of this is Adidas 1 with its computerized running shoe that got huge amount of fuss around it mainly because of its 250-dollar price tag promising increased status of a "hard-core runner" to anyone using the shoe. As much as the word price is about the currency, it is also about the value buyer thinks he receives by selecting the particular service from the particular company (Solomon et al., 2012).

Do customers consider the service is of a good value? How is the price competitive in the field? I think this part of marketing mix is more than anything else the continuum of excellent customer service, good business relationships and brilliant promotion. When

the actual prices are quite close to each other with two service providers, the image the customer has of both is the breaking point. If he already has some type of positive experience of one of the firms, he will most probably select that one. If not, everything depends on the marketing, especially promotional part of it. The company that seems more appropriate and appealing will be the one that is chosen.

### *Promotion*

The last “P” stands for promotion. Where and when can you get across your marketing messages to your target market? Promotion is the last piece of the puzzle, if there is the best time to promote the services, for example seasonality; promotion is the part that encourages prospective to take the action to buy (Solomon et al., 2012). Promotional question can be for instance “are there possibilities with highlighting the company history?” When customers hear your company’s story and place today’s position to the context, they will learn to know the company and its employees better. In today’s world consumers have learnt not to pay attention to adverts. Therefore content marketing is really important nowadays. Features that can be found for instance from TV, blogs or radio play a significant role in efficient content marketing (petersandeen.com. 2015).

I consider promotion as being the cherry on top of the cake. When the service that meets customer’s needs has competitive pricing and it can be found from the place where the customers are looking for it, everything comes down for the promotion. If the service is promoted well, there is no reason why the customer would not select it. Except of course competitors.

### *44 P’s of marketing*

Traditionally the theories of either 4 P’s or 20 P’s of marketing are discussed. However, when searched the topic even further, an article written by Peter Sandeen in his greatly praised business-related blog where he had introduced the concept of 44 P’s, could be found. Here are the ideas found the most relevant and innovative for small and medium-sized companies in service sector that target growing the business.

- ***Pandemic*** means aiming at creating advertisements and campaigns people are glad to spread and tell their friends about it. Great example of it is

Toyota and Swagger Wagon, a rap music video created to advertise their new car model Sienna SE which has reached 1,4 million views so far.

- **Picture** refers to the fact that always when it is possible use picture. Like Peter Sandeen phrases it “to understand a picture – you only need to glance at it. Reading takes time, glancing doesn’t. Don’t expect people to take time to read.”
- **Peers & Playfulness** go well combined together; get the credibility from the people who are already using the service. Social proof is probably one of the easiest ways to earn trust for the product. The message does not have to be playful but it has to wake emotions; choose the emotions that fit to the message you are conveying and make everything consistent with it.
- **Production** means all the ethical and ecological factors that are becoming more and more valued today. If there is any proof that the company is doing great in this area, it is important to show it.
- **Purple cow** basically sums everything together. The idea is to be remarkable, just like a purple cow is amongst the “normal” cows. The purpose of all the abovementioned marketing is to be interesting for the customer, to be special and by that, to make people buy from your company.

All of the P’s above are accessed from the website of Peter Sandeen, [petersandeen.com](http://petersandeen.com).

### 3.2 Innovation and growth

Innovation gives the competitive advantage for the business. Innovative, usually somewhat risky ideas are the way to company growth that is a fact. Furthermore, to seek advice and include customers in the process of business innovation are two valuable parts that will spread innovation both internally and externally (Business Government Australia. 2015). According to Goffin and Pfeiffer (1999) there are five areas within innovation that require good performance in order to actually be innovative, those five areas

include creativity in managing ideas, innovation strategy, portfolio management including proper selection as well as both implementation and human resource management.

To be innovative company should revise existing products and product lines and adapt those to meet the needs of both current and prospective customers. Taking the pioneering position at the leading edge of innovation by being the first to create innovative new services for the market is always the best way. Meanwhile simply being better at developing services or more effective in taking initiatives is a way to go, too. The key, after everything is done, is to be perceived as the best in customers' minds. Innovative thinking is part of business growth, as innovations create new while initiate better productivity (Oke, A. 2007).

According to Tiziana Russo-Spena and Cristina Mele (2012), there are five so-called "Co-s" in innovating. Co-ideation of ideas is the first stage to successful innovating and I find it the most valuable one of their research. Another ones are co-evaluation, co-design, co-test and co-launch of the product. A good example of co-ideation is Starbucks with their "MyStarbucksIdea" campaign where they developed their website to gain more views and improve the overall attractiveness of the page. They also added three sections for initiatives: "Got an idea?" "View ideas" and "Ideas in action". Anyone who enters the page can add an idea there, comment existing ones and see how earlier created ideas have progressed so far. Co-ideation is definitely the issue of today.

In order a small or medium-sized company can be innovative in developing its operations, all the employees should be trained to consider customers' needs and wants outside of the box and meanwhile propose ideas for how to develop the business operations. During the entire process of innovations adaptability, responsiveness and openness are in the core. The leadership plays a substantial role in the process; top down innovative and inspiring communication will drive the innovation in the business. A long-term relationship where you meet the client, listen to them and provide innovative solutions for the problem that you have just heard is the key. With personal relationships, it is easier for the client to trust and rely on the organization's actions and knowledge and then they can also rely on the innovations (Porkka, J., 2014).

### 3.3 Growth strategies

Commonly growth is seen ideal (Masurel and van Montfort, 2006) while lack of growth is seen a failure (Sexton, 1989). Bill Liabotis (2007) states in his article about growth strategies that in many cases companies who are willing to grow their operations, fail while aiming at it. Simply, as Liabotis explains, it is due to the fact that they do not have two major success factors, one being a clear growth strategy and the second being a strong execution infrastructure. Today when growth seems to be rather elusive, open-minded consideration of opportunities within the company's core business especially from possible new customer sub-segments' point of view is helpful. Then, re-considering the organizational infrastructure to support the growth is the following step to take (iveybusinessjournal.com, 2007).

While there are many ways to increase profits and grow the business, quite often the easiest way to start the growth is through the old customers. What type of customers as well as customer relationships the company currently has? What are the growth opportunities in these customers? With current customers the focus lays on how the company meets and greets them, in other words, how the service and the customer communicate (Porkka, J. 2014). In this point various different channels for communication are in the core; it is all about right time and right place.

Jodyanne Kirkwood (2009) states in all its simplicity that if an entrepreneur chooses to grow his business, growth is likely to occur. The proof for this she has found from various researches as well as from her own research where she investigated whether entrepreneurs who aspired for growth managed to make it happen in five years' time slot. According to Kirkwood, most of the companies targeted growth through either sales or employees. Company's good reputation, excellent employees, diversification and attention to customer service were the advantages for companies in service sector that eventually made the difference.

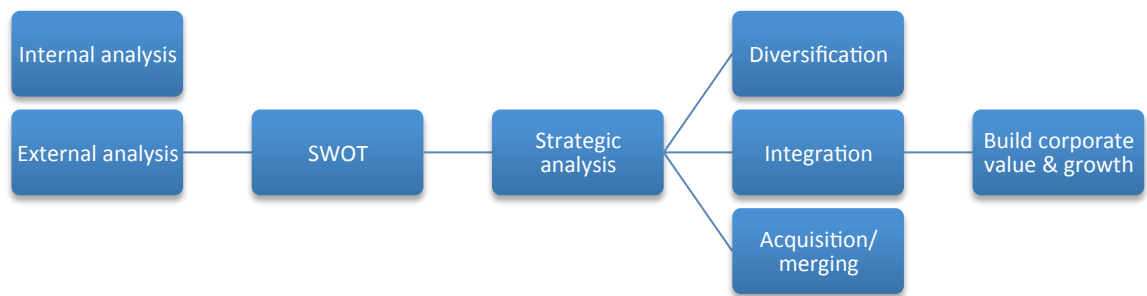


FIGURE 3. Flow chart of an increased corporate value. Source: Adapted from Groucutt (2007).

The figure above presents the elements that provide possibilities for growth. Both internal and external analysis should reflect both local and global situation in the field, as everything is interconnected one way or another. The SWOT analysis reviews internal and external factors of the company's current position in the context of ever-changing environment. The SWOT analysis should be critical review in order to be useful. Basically, the analysis is about matching internal strengths with external market opportunities and on the other hand about converting weaknesses to strengths and threats to opportunities (Groucutt, J. 2007).

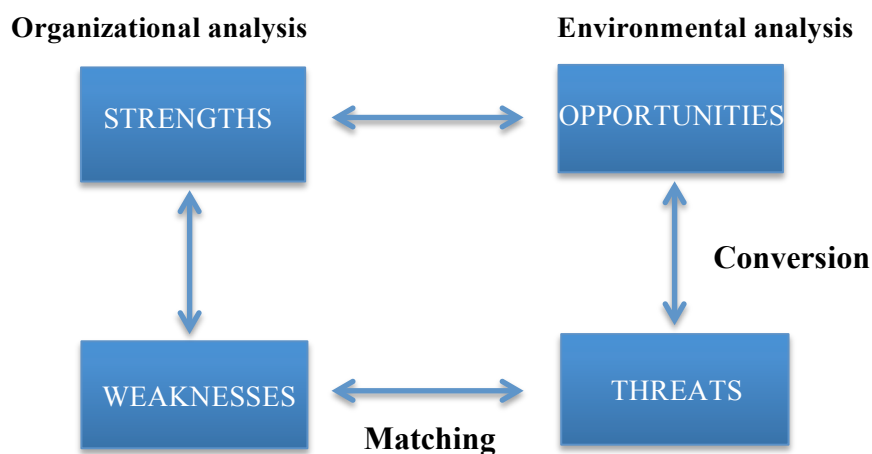


FIGURE 4. SWOT Analysis. Source: Adapted from Groucutt (2007).



Based on SWOT, some conclusions can be made and the strategic analysis be carried out. It is also the point where the necessary changes of direction should be discussed if there are any. One of the most highlighted parts of the strategic analysis is normally Ansoff's growth matrix, a tool that is commonly considered as one of the most efficient ones when planning growth. According to Ansoff (1987) two related types of strategy – portfolio analysis and competitive strategy form the basis of strategic thinking. In the matrix growth options depend on markets and products. Below the figure illustrates what it means briefly.



FIGURE 5. Ansoff's matrix. Source: research-methodology.net.

*Market penetration* is a growth strategy where the aim is to increase the level of sales of existing products in existing market.

In *market development* strategy the business enters new markets with existing products. While *product development* growth strategy includes introducing new products into current markets.

*Diversification* then again is a growth strategy where the company enters new markets with new products.

As shown in figure 2, in the case of promotion services, the multitude that the matrix can provide is rather large as the matrix covers both existing and potential markets for the product and how to best take the advantage of those (Groucutt, J. 2007). Also acqui-

sition, merger and integration are ways to build the company's value if done sustainably. Before jumping into these, Groucutt (2007) highlights the importance of strategic fit in the long-term as well as re-considering the company focus.

### **3.3.1 Extension and alliance growth strategies**

Brand managers aim at growing the brand. Brand extensions, which mean using the existing brand name for new products either in existing or in new product categories, have become the dominant form of growth strategy for many companies. By doing this the brand managers will make the brand's position stronger and possibly also reach new markets in nearby product categories. Meanwhile brand extensions also create a challenge; how far to stretch the brand, meaning the longer the brand extends, the longer is the stretch, in order to keep it consistent with the brand's current position (Samuelsen and Olsen, 2012).

In brand extension strategy, the brand relies completely on its own strength when moving to another product category. This may be risky especially when the new category is not a nearby one but a distant category where the knowledge of it may be rather insufficient. This type of extension may also harm the parent brand's first product category if the extension does not succeed in the new category (Samuelsen and Olsen, 2012). It is important to be careful that any product addition to the brand's portfolio will be consistent with the primary associations of the brand in consumer's mind (brandingstrategyinsider.com, 2012).

When the image brings positive connotations to customer, it will significantly improve the possibility to gain additional value and bigger sales for the product (Keller and Aaker, 1992). According to Kotler and Keller (2012) while brand extension growth strategy "facilitates new-product acceptance" it also gives the parent company valuable feedback of the product. And thus it can be considered as an efficient growth strategy in various companies.

Besides extension strategies, also to form a brand alliance meaning to join the forces of another already existing brand to reach wanted outcome of the sales, is an option for brand growth. In this case brand manager hopes that while combining the forces with

another brand, consumers better receive the new product or modified existing product and therefore it will bring more value for the company when in alliance than when reaching the market alone. This joining along in the category where the other brand already exists is called an “ingredient branding strategy”; the new brand which has allied with the one existing in the market is as much value-adding component to the existing brand than it is to the new one (Samuelsen and Olsen, 2012).

In their research Samuelsen and Olsen (2012) found out that in most of the cases extension strategies outperform alliance strategies as well as short-stretch strategies outperform long-stretch ones. However both strategies have their risks and advantages. For instance if the brand manager chooses to implement an extension strategy, he will take all risks but also all potential profits for himself. Meanwhile with an alliance strategy both risks and profits are shared with another company since the partner company may act in a way that harms the alliance or withdraws from it however it is also easier to gain consumer acceptance and possibly reach higher sales with the partner company (Samuelsen and Olsen, 2012).

Two major branches that can be found under extension strategies are rebranding and seeking new markets. The base for these two is in the SWOT analysis as well as in the Ansoff’s growth matrix. If those are done properly they should help to evaluate the current situation and answer the questions such as

- *Which type of services they have and how are they advertised currently?*
- *Which parts of the business portfolio could be increased?*
- *Is there possibly a new focus that could be found?*
- *How does it all support the growth?*

Rebranding the product can be anything from changing the name to re-creating the entire marketing plan for the product. Advertising campaigns, social media marketing and creating buzz around the product through word-of-mouth marketing are the ones that are considered as the most visible re-branding ways of today. When it comes to social media, for example Facebook, the various ways one can market them in it, are limitless. Blogs are another path many marketers take nowadays; it is an efficient way to increase the sales and to change the product image to match the target group better. To rebrand the product, the focus as well as wanted outcome is important to consider beforehand.

## 4 BENCHMARKING

This chapter introduces further the concept of benchmarking, what it means and how it can be applied to this particular case of OFRD Oy. The chapter will lead the reader through the basics of benchmarking followed by the reasoning of particular segments of business to be evaluated in the comparison of OFRD and Irokeesi. The actual benchmarking implementation is then followed by analysis and discussion of the process, *what can be learned from Irokeesi and from other competitors?*

### 4.1 Benchmarking basics

An entrepreneur and former Inc. 500 CEO Keith McFarland had a problem while writing his book; he could not find basically any material considering how to first grow a small business into a big one and then maintain the growth in the long-term. When McFarland was interviewed he simply stated that since there was no ready material about it, he “studied the companies who had done it to learn their lessons” (inc.com. 2010). This is what benchmarking is all about.

According to Battagello, Cricelli and Grimaldi (2016) even though every company is a unique composition of parts, it is valuable to remember that the market rules are the same for every company willing to join the competition. It is both strategic assets and core competencies and the level of how well these are aligned with the resources, which then define how unique the company actually is. Normally the process of benchmarking begins with finding the critical success points in the wanted field. Based on that improvements regarding processes, data and strategies can be planned and implemented.

Today companies must have three things: quality that extends the competition, technology before the competition and costs lower than competitors have. In conclusion, a company should strive to be better, faster and more versatile as well as cheaper than competitors. That’s why benchmarking is found so useful. Benchmarking is known to be management tool that helps to improve the processes, learn the best practices and understand the competition better (Anand and Kodali, 2008)

After evaluating various existing studies of benchmarking, Stapenhurst (2009) concluded two aspects that can be found in all of the studies the first being “comparison of per-

formance levels to ascertain which organization(s) is achieving superior performance levels” and secondly “identification adaption/improvement, and adaption of the practices that lead to these superior levels of performance.”

Based on these researchers it is obvious that benchmarking will provide data both of the surrounding environment of the company and what is most important, of the competitors. Learning the best tactics and combining them with company’s unique proposition for consumers, diversified offering can be presented with future mind-set and price that meets the value of the service.

## **4.2 Benchmarking process and segments**

To measure the competitiveness, it is vital to know what are the advantages and disadvantages compared to the competitors (Porkka, J. 2014). With comparison it is easier to evaluate how well the organization is actually able to sell and thus compete with the services they offer in the market. Benchmarking process in this thesis was conducted between OFRD and Irokeesi.

Irokeesi is currently the number one experiential marketing agency in Finland with the compelling tagline of ”nothing creates believers like experiences and believers create us”; they promise to deliver experiential marketing off the charts. The agency is part of psLIVE, an experiential agency network with offices in notable cities around the Europe covering capitals of Northern Europe as well as Milan, London, Paris, Brussels and Madrid. Besides this, Irokeesi is also part of global media group Dentsu Aegis network. Since 2006 Irokeesi has implemented 8 million demonstrations which have created 1,5 million purchases in-store per year. This has enabled 45 marketing professionals of Irokeesi who are operating in Helsinki and 1200 brand ambassadors on the field (irokeesi.fi. 2016).

The comparison of three sub-parts, the main subjects that are found relevant today is implemented. These three comparable analysis points are the website, company strategy and social media. The topics were chosen based on their ability to present the growth opportunities as well as the gaps that should be first filled and then exceeded in order to be Finland’s best experiential marketing agency as OFRD aims to be.

Today websites do matter. It is the first place where to search for the reason to select the company over competitors. If the website does not impress the viewer, no reason to try to make the second first impression face to face. Without a doubt strategy is in the core of everything so it must be considered in the benchmarking process. Last but not the least comes social media, which appears to be everywhere nowadays. Social media can be counted as part of excellent customer service today as it is both a channel to inform about the updates as well as offers and to entertain as well as express opinions and views.

### **4.3 Benchmarking comparison and analysis**

This chapter will lead the reader through the main sub-segments of the benchmarking process; namely the website, the strategy and social media. Each and every of the sub-parts are followed by a small conclusion of findings. In the end of the benchmarking chapter, lessons learned from other companies offering event promotions can be examined.

#### **4.3.1 The website**

Websites today differ greatly from what they used to be in the past. This dates back to the higher demands consumers nowadays have since such a large portion of business communications is now handled online. An excellent, eye-catching website is an ensemble, a process from everything optimized for a consumer to reach the site to actually make the decision to buy on the site. The figure below demonstrates the 5 Pillar Approach, the linkage between the parts of a website that should be considered.

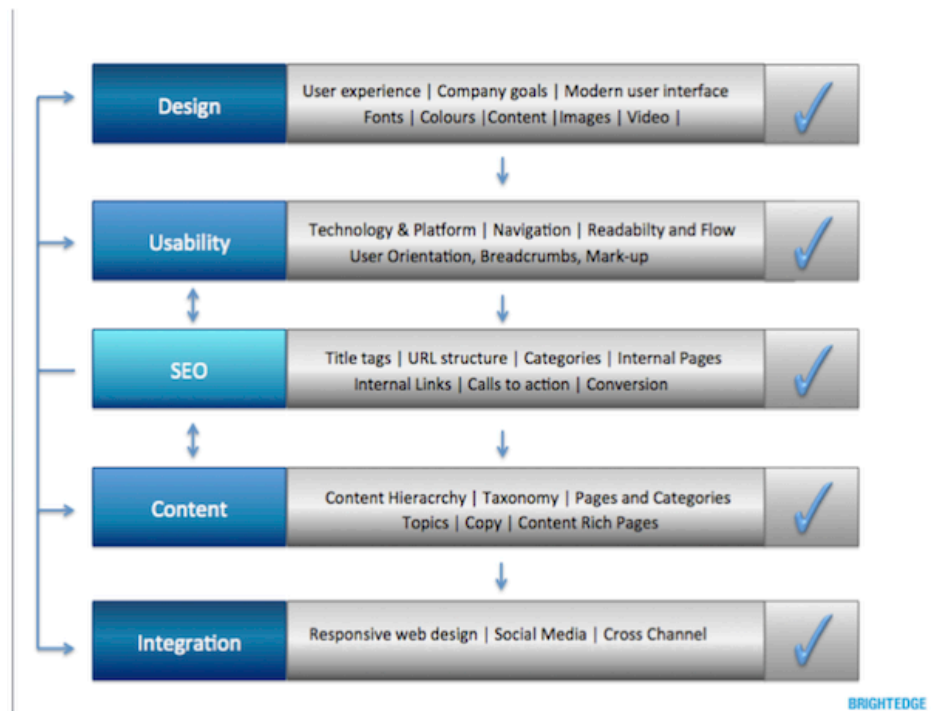
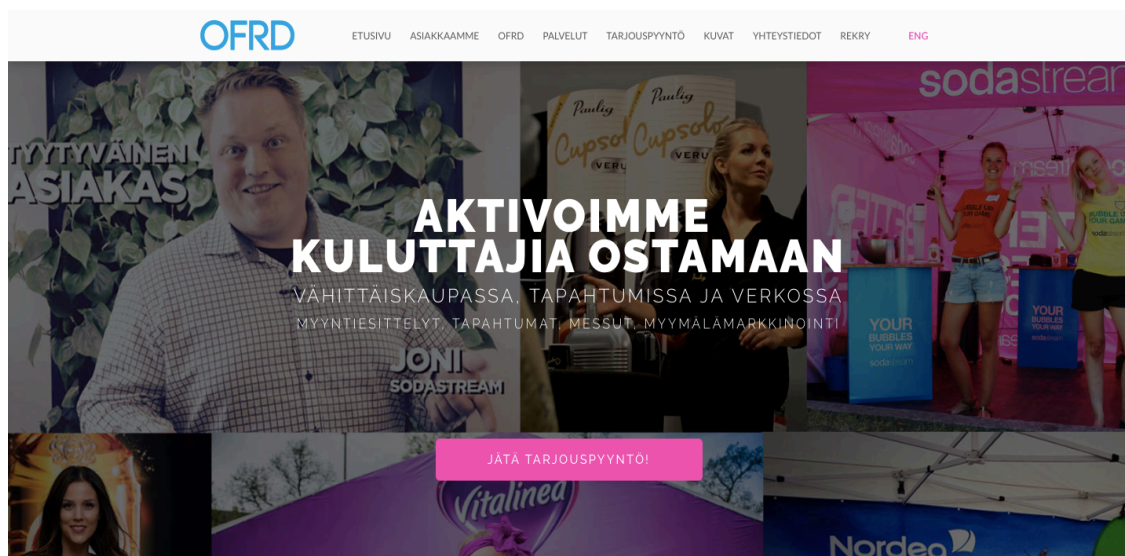


FIGURE 6. The five Pillar Approach. Source: searchenginewatch.com.

To start with, currently the webpage of OFRD communicates well. The design is up-to-date, it is user-friendly both in computer and in mobile and it is rich in content. Also the pictures greet the page visitor with big smile, no matter whether the visitor is engaging with the website in Finnish or in English. At the bottom of the page, social media channels and presentation video are easily accessible.



PICTURE 2. The first glance of the webpage of OFRD, in the domain ofrd.fi

What comes to the website of Irokeesi, the first look at the page promises creative solutions and loads of innovation. Like stated in the chapter 3.2, the key is to be perceived as the best in customers' minds. Irokeesi trusts that their accomplishments will say everything needed and thus at the top of the page there is an American-style, show business like presentation video of them. The video does speak for itself. Besides the video, all the basics in the event promotions field for instance including customer listing and promotion cases are found on the page as well.



PICTURE 3. The first glance of the webpage of Irokeesi, in the domain irokeesi.fi

Basically, quite similar content is found from both of the websites of Irokeesi and OFRD but what is the breaking point there? What makes the biggest difference between those two sites is that the website of Irokeesi creates emotions while the website of OFRD does not. They both have presentation videos but only the one Irokeesi has makes you feel that you want to be part of all that glory and success. The content of the video of Irokeesi is not of anything more than the one OFRD has but the way it has been filmed is completely different. The companies are very different in size and resources obviously but actually the only breaking point that puts those two companies in



different categories from the website's point of view is the video. Meanwhile it is easier to identify with the video of OFRD, marketing is more effective in the one of Irokeesi.

From the marketing side, the video is exactly what is searched today. "We get people talking" is a phrase used in the middle of the video. The buzz, word-of-mouth marketing is what every company should be in the market for. Like stated in the chapter 3.1.4, the aim is to be *pandemic*, aim is to create something people want to spread around and tell their peers about. The metaphor of *purple cow* was presented in the same chapter. Company should create means for standing out from others; Irokeesi differentiates from the competition in two minutes' live picture.

### *Conclusion*

Currently the website of OFRD communicates well. It is also rather similar in comparison to the industry leader in Finland. With the first glance in the website and by only comparing it with Irokeesi, there are not many improvements to be done. However, there is a need for an improvement in the presentation video of OFRD.

#### **4.3.2 The strategy**

Growth is commonly a result of innovation-based strategy, strong leadership in the dissemination of business or acquired from portfolio growth. Besides these, environmental issues may affect the situation. Also acquisitions do happen frequently. What makes the company desirable and increases the competitiveness is the right strategy.

In chapter 3.3 the significance of SWOT analysis as well as Ansoff's growth matrix was discussed and it showed that these two could be valuable players in the strategic field. The strategy OFRD currently should execute is market penetration, referring to aiming at growth with existing products in existing markets. The goal is to increase the market share all the way to the saturation point when the market reaches its full capacity and then other strategies must be applied in order to keep growing. In contrary to this, it seems like Irokeesi pursues growth with market development strategy. They aim at delivering existing services to new markets. As a pioneering company, this makes sense.

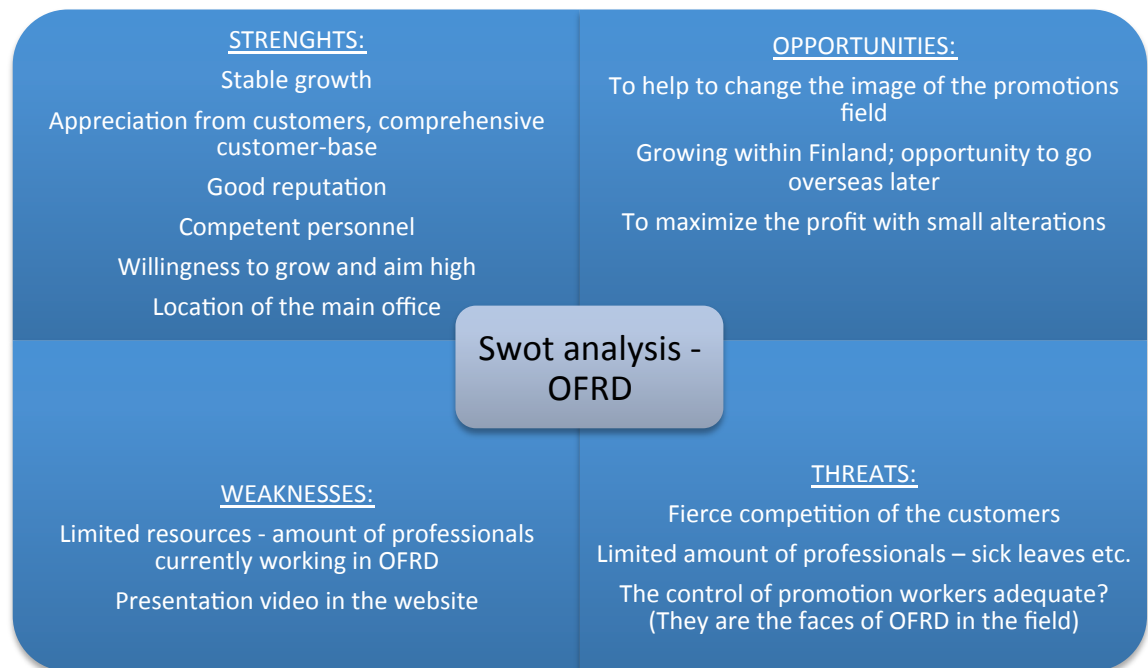


FIGURE 7. SWOT analysis of OFRD.

Organizational analysis includes company strengths and weaknesses and in contrary to this environmental analysis concludes the facts of opportunities as well as threats. The goal is to match weaknesses to threats and this way turn environmental threats into organizational weaknesses to cope with those more efficiently. In addition to this, goal is to convert threats into opportunities in order to handle the possible threats before they become reality.

The fierce competition and what it may cause for the company is probably the biggest threat of OFRD currently. That is the reason why benchmarking the situation was found vital in the thesis. Then, what has Irokeesi done to overcome the threats OFRD may currently face? Naturally, the aim is to beat the competition.

Overall, Irokeesi has been operating three years longer than OFRD as they started the business in 2006 already. The pioneering status is manifesting itself with the figures in 2014. While OFRD created a turnover of 791 000 euros with the financial year profit for the period of 80 000, Irokeesi concluded the year with turnover of over 10 million with profit of 718 000 (finder.fi). The strategy of Irokeesi is clearly to dominate the ex-

periential marketing field and being part of international brand experience network psLIVE is a proof of that as well.

With a large network behind the company, it is simply easier to create connections abroad as well while it may also be the source of new projects and customers globally. The type of brand experience network naturally also gives reliability for the smaller, local company. When considered from OFRD's point of view, it is not something that is easy to compete with. However customers from smaller companies may consider co-operating with a large corporation more time-consuming and painstaking than co-operating with a local one. This niche is made for OFRD.

The global approach Irokeesi implements with English website and brand experience network psLIVE is something no other players in the field can compete with. That is how they beat the competition when credits locally in Finland already speak for themselves. They have aimed high and succeeded.

Another two threats of OFRD deal with the personnel; the level of supervision you can have with promoter workers and the small amount of professionals working in OFRD. The personnel of Irokeesi include 45 marketing professionals and around 1300 promoters who enable a bunch of simultaneously executed projects. As they advertise in their website, combined years of experience they can offer is 325. In comparison to this, OFRD operates with 5 marketing professionals and 150 promoters. This naturally creates a wide gap between these two companies in a sense of the number of projects that can be implemented. Of course the smaller amount of personnel means smaller expenses, too.

In the area of event promotions, customer segmentation by the field they are specialised in for instance food and beverages is not that commonly utilised. Practically the status is acquired with notable, big names as customers. Like concluded in the chapter 3.1.3, customer-oriented businesses are the most sustainable ones. When it comes to experiential marketing, every single project is basically designed for the customers' specific purposes.

Irokeesi implemented over 200 projects for its customers in 2014. While OFRD's customer base has a wide range of customers from really big names such as Stockmann to

smaller ones, the focus is on Finnish brands. Customers of Irokeesi include big Finnish as well as global names such as Coca Cola, Arla, Nissan, Metsä Group and Sonera. The difference is on the fact the only the largest customers are visible on the website of Irokeesi.

### *Conclusion*

In order to be able to implement more, larger projects it would be advised for OFRD to hire a new professional. Of course it must be kept in mind that the expenses should be considered carefully while doing this and thus a provision-based hiring would also be an option. Today the customer list of OFRD is of a great potential. To make it look even better already before they grow, some adjustments should be made.

#### **4.3.3 Social media**

We live in the era of Web 2.0, meaning the opportunity for limitless sharing of content in the interactive environment where users become participants in business processes. Meanwhile this opens plenty of opportunities to consumers, Web 2.0 also provides companies with the chance to learn about market, get feedback from the products as well as staying in touch with the customers directly (Constantinides and Fountain, 2008).

Why social media is of great importance in this thesis' benchmarking chapter is the fact how strongly it has become part of brand building activities of basically any up-to-date marketing and sales specified company (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

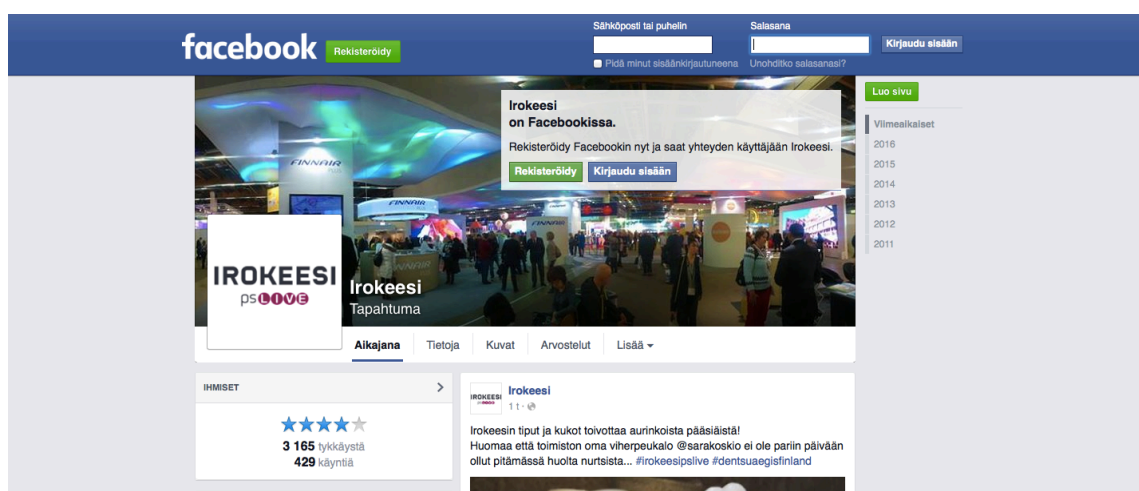
Social media, which is also known as "content that has been created by its audience" (Comm, 2009) is commonly differentiated to sub-sections. Facebook which is notoriously known as the largest channel of communication of social media with its over billion monthly users is characterized as social networking channel. Both Irokeesi and OFRD utilise Facebook. OFRD also creates content to twitter, which is known as micro blogging and uses YouTube for video sharing. Both Irokeesi and OFRD have accounts in picture-sharing page, Instagram, as well.

## Facebook

OFRD and Irokeesi both have really similar Facebook-pages advertising the campaigns they are implementing. No matter whether Irokeesi is an industry leader in Finland, there is no great success in Facebook. The likes they get for individual pictures or updates they post are somewhere about 10 likes which is an extremely small amount. Overall 3165 people follow the website of Irokeesi, meanwhile OFRD has 1342 followers. Synchronized Facebook and Instagram, meaning that they post the same pictures with same texts to both simultaneously, clearly makes using these two social media platforms a great amount easier when the content must be created only once.



PICTURE 4. The Facebook page of OFRD (facebook.fi)

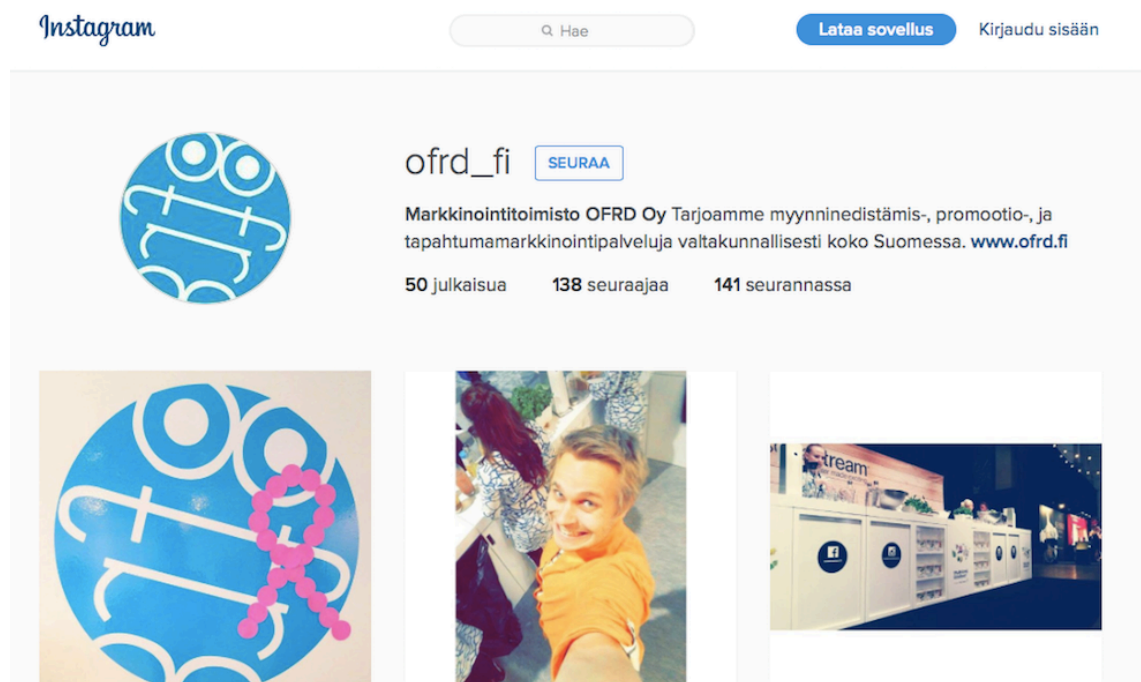


PICTURE 5. The Facebook page of Irokeesi (facebook.fi)

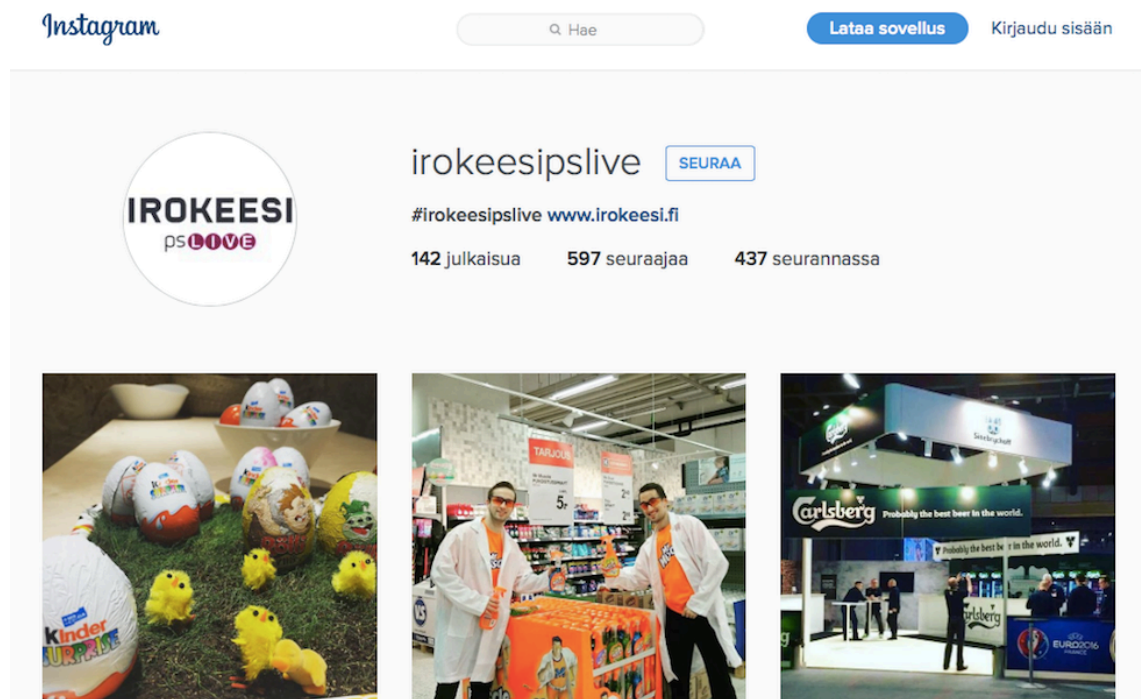
A really smart move OFRD has made is to add the recruitment button to the top panel of their Facebook home page. The thing of today in the recruitment area is to be creative and learn how to get people engaged with the company in the places they commonly visit, Facebook with its billion users is definitely a place for it. All in all, there is not much to learn from Facebook page of Irokeesi, OFRD handles using Facebook clearly, as well. However based on these two pages, using Facebook does not appear to be a great resource for business opportunities in the experiential marketing field. It appears to be something a company should have but not to use too much time around it.

### *Instagram*

Instagram is all about picture sharing and receiving likes for the content the company posts. The amount of followers in Instagram directly measures the amount of people who may reach the content. Currently ofrd\_fi has 138 followers for its 50 posts while irokeesiplive has 597 followers for its 142 posts. The content they share is rather similar. Naturally, since Irokeesi has more followers the content they share reaches bigger audience.



PICTURE 6. Instagram page of OFRD (instagram.com)



PICTURE 7. Instagram page of Irokeesi (instagram.com)

Based on chapter 3.1.4 social proof makes it proportionally easier for the customer to trust the product and receive the message that conveys some type of emotions. To understand the picture, only a quick glance is required. This is why Instagram as a picture-sharing page is efficient. Like the CEO of OFRD Karri Ruuskanen stated, they want to change the image of the entire promotional field to match what it actually is today. As far as I am concerned, Instagram works for that, too, as the picture content company shares is completely up to their own evaluation.

### *Conclusion*

Overall, it does not seem to be of great importance in the field of experiential marketing that how many followers company has in different channels. Instagram and Facebook and other social media platforms are amongst other things direct channels of communication, the places to meet the customer. However, in this field they seem to be a good addition not really a necessity.

#### **4.3.4 What can be learned from other competitors in the field?**



When looking through the websites and social media channels of significant competitors of OFRD, there are some clear patterns. Websites of many competitors have clear, simple layout and the head offices are located in Helsinki or Espoo. What I noticed was that the majority of big players in the field had the numbers in the website such as “2000 hours of creative design”, “300 projects a year” or “1,5 million consumers met in the projects”. At some point it started to feel that the ones who did not have the numbers were not as trustworthy as the companies with figures. As far as I am concerned, no matter what the figures, the point was to show how much they managed to do in a year.

Being global was another aspect found from the competitors’ websites. Since the population of the country where we live in is rather small, growth will eventually lead us abroad and not only that. Many huge corporations already in Finland have part of their employees of other nationalities and also those who do not have, probably have international mind-set meaning that they want to pursue the opportunities with companies who have the same mind-set. Clearly these big players are the ones OFRD aims to grab for itself.

The ways globalisation was visible on the websites was the amount of languages some competitors were able to pull off and the countries they were able to cover and to provide their services to. As an example SP-Works ([www.sp-works.com](http://www.sp-works.com)) offers all of their services with five different languages therefore covering also Russia, Estonia and Sweden as their operating field. Another example is a competitor called Malja, which recalls internationalisation as part of their strategy. They state in their website ([www.malja.com](http://www.malja.com)) that they have excellent partnership network around the world; they cover Northern Europe, Russia as well as Baltics without any problem and also have implemented projects as far as in the middle-East and the US.

What comes to social media aspects, almost all of the competitors name to have Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and professional networking site LinkedIn as their account. Yet no great success stories were found in any of those above-mentioned. One of the competitors called Ramson ([www.ramson.fi](http://www.ramson.fi)) also had a blog, which I found as an interesting idea for a marketing agency. Yet they had only posted once a year something so it actually did not make any difference to have it. Ramson appeared to be one of the only competitors with presentation video, as well. However the video seemed to be



made in a rush since it had a couple of spelling mistakes and all in all, it was not anything of an inspiration, it did not wake any emotions.

### *Conclusion*

It is common and advised to present the numbers in the website since it seems like a pattern amongst the competitors in the field. In addition to this, globalization and international aspects are good to be considered and if any global advantages can be found within the company, they should be presented in the website to stand out from the competition which, without a doubt, is fierce. It is easy to stand out with a good presentation video and if resources and interest can be found, also a blog might an idea to consider. The social media of OFRD matches well the competition.

## 5 MAIN FINDINGS

This chapter of the thesis will answer to the research questions; the main question being, *which strategy should be applied when aiming at company growth in the field of event promotions?* While introducing the main findings of the thesis, this chapter also provides the basis for recommendations and final conclusions found from the following chapter.

The supporting research questions phrased in the start of the thesis process included two questions about competitors, which were eventually analysed in the benchmarking chapter. These two were: *what are the competitive advantages of the biggest competitors?* And *what can be learned from them?* Besides this, three questions about strategic tools and implementation were presented: *What are the tools for sustainable growth?* *How other companies have grown their businesses?* And *how to implement the best growth strategy in practice?* Answers to these questions are shown in this chapter, as well.

### 5.1 Theoretical framework

In chapter 3.1 the view of how success will look like in 10 years was introduced. While it is impossible to know what customers value in 10 years, innovative long-term strategic planning plays a significant role in the growth strategies. As important it is to plan, it is also to reflect the changes of the surrounding environment to the business functions. Today, social media and global approach for business are the so-called fashion words. However that may not be the case in 10 years.

It was advised in the chapter 3.1.2 to concentrate on the four biggest challenges over the coming year. Also if possible, aim to gain knowledge of what five issues customers consider being the best about the company. The coming year is economically rather easy to predict compared to longer-term time slots. Also the prevailing trends are in sight, at least the majority of those. All in all, traditional short-term and long-term goals still stick to their guns. However new, more focused approach may be the path to growth. Later two major success factors every company targeting growth should em-

brace were introduced; the first is clear growth strategy and the second is a strong execution infrastructure. Also innovation and risk-taking follow in the list.

According to Ruuskanen, their vision in OFRD is to be the best working place for the employees and the best marketing agency for the customers in the promotions field roughly in four years. Not only concentrating on the four biggest challenges over the coming year but also including customers to the entire process of creating the improvements could help to reach this goal. It would also support the view presented in chapter 3.1.1 that in order to be successful, customers should be included in the process from the idea creation to developing the services and all the way to commercializing.

Then again, chapter 3.1.4 goes deeper into marketing presenting a view that in order to be effective, marketing should always be pandemic. The content should be of something customers are happy to spread and this once again comes down to the point how company presentation video is actually a good idea when executed in a way it catches the eye of a consumer and also stays in mind after seeing it. Both pictures and videos should convey a message, an emotion, a feeling, something that will leave a memory on consumer's mind. Example of the purple cow concludes it all, aim is to be noticed and chosen from the competition. No matter which niche is the focused one, the aim is to be the best in the world in that area.

At the moment the marketing video of OFRD is anything but pandemic and it does not convey an emotion. In the presentation video of OFRD their customer who represents Soda Stream gives credit to OFRD of how well everything was handled. However as he is the only person recommending, it is not really convincing. To add one or two persons in the video or have some type of quotes from satisfied customers in the website would be of great help. Also, as learned from the industry leader in Finland, the video does not have to present anything else except what is actually happening in the field but it must be made in a catchy way.

One of the sub-questions was that of how other companies have grown their businesses. In chapter 3.3 sales and employees were the channels that did bring growth. To mention some more specific paths in the service sector, company's good reputation, diversification and great attention to customer service were the breaking points. It was also sug-

gested to place a lot of effort on already existing customers to see if there are growth opportunities.

In the case of OFRD the goal is to get more notable names as customers and by this get more credit behind their brand name. This might be possible to reach and implement with one or two additional provision-based workers who would help thus to reach greater sales and simply, be more profitable, this all eventually leading to growth. But clearly if the goal is to grow, it must be targeted passionately and searched beyond the borders. It was one of the lessons learned of the theory part; those who decided to grow were more likely to succeed in it compared to those who considered growth as side effect that may result.

Brand extensions, like stated in 3.3.1, are the biggest source of growth for many today. This could be one option for OFRD; they could create new services under the company name and try to reach for growth with this. Even though they already now offer a broad variety of services it would be advised to have some sort of listing of the services in the website to show that there actually is a lot OFRD can plan and implement. A good example of this is once again Irokeesi. In the website of Irokeesi services are categorized under four different sub-headings: brand activations, events, in-store activations and other services. This creates illusion of tens of different services they can offer even though many of the listed parts are hugely interlinked, barely even their own sections.

Another opportunity lies on brand alliance strategy. Practically all the promotion events OFRD currently implements utilise both the customer brand name and their own in the events. Yet creating an alliance with another small or medium-sized event promotions agency they could possibly execute projects abroad and take care of larger amount of customers simultaneously. Also achieving to be a part of some larger brand network would bring new opportunities and potential big customers.

## **5.2 Benchmarking**

One of the research questions was that *what are the competitive advantages of the biggest competitors?* So what can be learned from them? Today customer-oriented approach is vital. In the era of Web 2.0 customers already have their say of the services in

various web channels, slightly uncontrollably for the companies. By including consumers in the service creation and advertising, the probability of a successful end product will be highly improved. No matter in which field the company operates in, strong focus in operations is a must.

The 5-pillar approach that was presented in chapter 4.3.1, introduced the most dominant factors of website. The benchmarking was made between Irokeesi and OFRD, simply because the website of Irokeesi communicates extremely well and supports the pioneering position of the company in the field. It was found that the parts that needed the biggest improvements on the website of OFRD were from design section their videos, otherwise the design of the website is up-to-date, clear and with the simplistic design and light colours, also Scandinavian. Besides this, the navigation on the website and the readability are both great. The pages and categories have parts that can be improved to make the pages richer in content. The last part of the 5-pillar approach is integration, which has social media as a significant part of it.

I believe that the things happening now with social media are only a small fraction of what it has to offer for the future. As year-by-year the role of social media channels has got bigger and the variety of topics that are handled there is getting wider and wider, I find it hard to believe that there would occur a great downfall and the means of social media would disappear. While it is important generally, in the field of event promotions does it pay the effort to be in various social media channels?

Exposure to the company brand in various channels naturally improves the possibility to reach prospective customers; company *plants* the image of themselves and what they do to customers' minds. This planting in a way creates a buzz around the service. Meanwhile the user generated content can be embraced, customers have the possibility to share their personal stories, exchange ideas and possibly come up with valuable information of what should be included in the business portfolio; *what do they actually want*. Additionally, these social media channels help to present different sides of the company, humour in the pictures but motivational content in the text. A cross-media story can be conveyed there. Furthermore, company has the chance to create the vision of what part the service is playing in consumers' life and send it in a form they decide. However, social media is also a place to handle the negativity in sustainable way, the place to turn the negativity into a conversation with the potential customers.

Irokeesi has double the amount of followers in Facebook compared to OFRD. How to grow the amount of followers then? Facebook for many is not about communicating with companies but to stay in touch with relatives and friends. However, content people want to share is the content that is pandemic, meaning videos, competitions; basically anything that creates an emotion, emotion that most commonly is happiness. Enhancing the follower figures of Facebook would possibly make the page more attractive and therefore that recruitment button would definitely be more in use, as well.

Social proof is similarly important in Instagram. This social media channel is a way to change the image of promotions field. It is also place to share content with emotions, present company ideology in a catchy way and create an image of the company. Like in Facebook, also in Instagram more followers would make the social proof more obvious and easier to relate to. Instagram is the place where you maintain the image of the company in people's minds, that's why the posting speed is there high priority.

In chapter 4.3.2 it was stated that currently OFRD is in a place where market penetration until the saturation point is reached is the best strategy for them. To grow with the smaller companies in bulk; meanwhile continuously reach for the larger companies and bigger names. The SWOT analysis pointed out that it is highly important to keep on training the promotion workers to be the sales professionals OFRD aims them to be as they are the faces of OFRD in the actual brand activations, as well. What is great, nowadays OFRD already rewards the promotions employee of the month so the direction is definitely right.

Benchmarking with other competitors besides Irokeesi showed that the implemented figures should be visible in the website; that seemed to be a sort of a pattern in the field, probably because of the extreme competition where every company clearly aims to be the winning one. Additionally, any partnerships or professionals who would bring global aspects to the company would be of a great addition to point out from the competition.

## 6 RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter introduces the recommendations for OFRD based on the research study. Both the theoretical framework part and benchmarking have been utilised to reach these conclusions already introduced in more words in the previous chapter. These recommendations, if implemented in practice, would support the growth of OFRD and be part of their growth strategy during the next couple of years.

When aiming at clear growth strategy, it is advised to go deeper in the topic of how success is predicted to look like in the event promotions field in 10 years and adapt that into the long-term strategy. Also consider four biggest challenges over the coming year and aim at reaching the knowledge of what five issues customers consider the best in the company. These two would then be part of short-term strategy.

Overall, small and medium sized companies had reached growth through sales and employees. This supports the vision that small or medium-sized company in the service sector should aim at maintaining excellent reputation and paying plenty of effort on customer service while offering diversified products. Market penetration strategy, meaning to simultaneously penetrate the market and get a foothold with smaller customer while reaching for the larger ones to grow works for OFRD currently and is advised to be the strategy for future, too.

It would be recommended to limit the customer list visible on the website to only include the more notable, bigger names. Even though customer base of OFRD is comprehensive, the brand logos on the website are for advertising OFRD, when most of the brands present industry leaders, it simply makes a better image of the company. In contrary to this, the list of provided services should be visible on the site. Event promotions can be divided into smaller sub-sections, to have broad list of all of the provided services simply looks convincing and professional on the website. In addition to this, in the website there should be numeric facts to show how successful OFRD has been last year, as this is clearly a top-notch topic in the field.

Co-operation with other small or medium sized experiential marketing agency to execute bigger projects, possibly also abroad would be a great launch for the growth. Also one option would be to hire a professional, possibly provision-based, who would aim at

waking the interest in the bigger customers' minds and then the CEO of OFRD Karri Ruuskanen would close the deal in the actual sales presentations.

What comes to social media, all of the channels should have similar outlook and be interlinked like Facebook and Instagram are already now in the case of OFRD. Even though some channels such as YouTube and Twitter were not found as significant in the field, the existence of those is always a positive issue. The posting speed in Instagram should be maintained in the level where it was last September. Two to three updates a week would keep the company name in followers' minds. The content should be of waking emotions and be pandemic, to plant the positive, prolific image of OFRD.

There is a need for improvement in the presentation video of OFRD. The goal is to make it more powerful, more global and simply present everything OFRD has done in more self-confident way. Experiential marketing and event promotions have had difficult years and many of the competitors have fell down, the aim is to show why OFRD still stands strong.



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### **The focus companies**

Irokeesi

Company website. <http://www.irokeesi.fi>

Company Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/irokeesi/?fref=ts>

Company Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/irokeesipslive/>

OFRD Ltd.

Company website. <http://ofrd.fi>

Company Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/ofrdoy/?fref=ts>

Company Instagram. [https://www.instagram.com/ofrd\\_fi/](https://www.instagram.com/ofrd_fi/)